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U.S. to Appeal Ruling On Pentagon Documents

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 — The trial of three men accused of conspiring to steal classified Pentagon planning documents for a military contractor, due to begin today, was postponed at the request of the prosecution.

Prosecutors said they would appeal the pretrial ruling by Federal District Judge Richard Cacheris to allow the defense to use a large amount of classified material as evidence.

Defense lawyers have argued that the documents at issue in the case have routinely circulated for years among the nation's military contractors. The attorneys have said they would show during the trial that simi-

lar documents were freely made available to the contractor, the GTE Government Systems Corporation.

Last year, GTE pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiring to obtain the planning documents in order to use them to defraud the Government's bidding process.

At the same time, a Federal grand jury indicted Walter R. Edgington, a GTE vice president; Robert R. Carter, a former marketing manager for the company, and Bernie E. Zetl, a former consultant, on a variety of charges stemming from GTE's purported efforts to obtain the documents. The three pleaded not guilty.

Mr. Edgington and Mr. Zetl were charged with espionage and theft of government property. Mr. Carter was accused of participating in a conspiracy to steal Government property and defraud the bidding process.

In the pretrial maneuvering, defense lawyers served subpoenas on nearly 100 Pentagon officials. The lawyers have asked the Government for a large number of classified documents that they contend are relevant to the case.

The Government has sought to limit the amount of classified information that could be used in the case in a series of closed hearings before Judge Cacheris. But the defense largely prevailed in the hearings, and the trial would have allowed the jury — and the public — to see documents written as recently as 1984 that remain classified.